

May 1995

OPERATION DESERT STORM

Health Concerns of Selected Indiana Persian Gulf War Veterans



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**Health, Education, and
Human Services Division**

B-258098

May 16, 1995

The Honorable Dan Burton
The Honorable Steve Buyer
The Honorable Lee H. Hamilton
The Honorable John Hostettler
The Honorable Andrew Jacobs, Jr.
The Honorable John T. Myers
The Honorable Mark E. Souder
House of Representatives

Many veterans of the Persian Gulf War have expressed concern that their service in Southwest Asia in some way caused chronic health problems. The severity of these problems reported varies; some veterans report relatively mild symptoms, while others report debilitating illnesses. The cause or causes of these problems is unknown, but many causes have been suggested, including exposure to chemical or other toxic agents, parasitic infestations, medications given as a precaution against possible exposure to nerve agents, and stress. Persian Gulf veterans' health concerns have received considerable attention by Congress, federal agencies and the media. Both the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DOD) have undertaken research efforts to determine the extent and causes of these illnesses and have established programs to provide health examinations to identify and respond to these veterans' health concerns.

You asked that we obtain information related to health concerns for certain Gulf War veterans from the 123rd Army Reserve Command (ARCOM), headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana. Members of the ARCOM, according to command officials, were among the first to raise Persian Gulf-related health concerns. Early in 1992, the Surgeon General of the Army directed a team from the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research to examine the 125 ARCOM members who, by that time, had made their health concerns known to the ARCOM.

In response to your request, we obtained information on the current military and health status of these 125 Persian Gulf War veterans, the health care they have received, and their opinions of that health care. Most of this information was obtained through a survey of the 125 ARCOM veterans we conducted in November 1994. Of the 125, 89 responded.¹ The

¹After mailing out the survey, we learned that 2 of the 125 reservists had passed away. Of the remaining 123, 72 percent (89) responded to our survey.

information reported from the survey cannot be generalized beyond these respondents to any other Persian Gulf veterans. Information on health status and quality of care was not verified through means such as physical examinations and is based solely on the perceptions of the respondents. We also interviewed officials from the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs; the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research; the VA medical center in Indianapolis, Indiana; and the ARCOM. We also reviewed pertinent policy documents. We did our work between July 1994 and March 1995 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Appendix I describes the methodology for our survey. Appendix II is a copy of the survey showing responses for each question.

Results in Brief

Despite DOD and VA efforts to address the concerns of these and other Persian Gulf veterans, those we surveyed still expressed concerns about their health and dissatisfaction with services from DOD and VA. Most respondents were still in the reserves and almost all reported that they had health problems they believed were caused by their service in the Persian Gulf. Most also reported that these problems limited their physical and social activities to some extent. Because all of the individuals we surveyed had already expressed some concern about their health, the fact that they reported having health problems after returning from the Persian Gulf is not surprising.

Over half of the respondents had taken advantage of medical services, either the special examinations or other health care, available to them through VA or DOD. Many, however, were dissatisfied with the medical care they received or were unaware of services available. DOD and VA have undertaken a variety of efforts to address the concerns raised by Persian Gulf veterans, including expanding the health examinations available to them. Also, in response to recent legislation, both agencies are expanding outreach efforts to better ensure that veterans are aware of services available. Whether these efforts will satisfy these veterans' concerns remains to be seen.

Background

Between November 1990 and March 1991, 1,200 members of the ARCOM were sent to the Persian Gulf; most returned between March and August 1991. The ARCOM's mission was combat service support, and members were not involved in frontline combat. In January 1992, officials of the ARCOM

first became aware of members' medical complaints and symptoms. In February 1992, one ARCOM member, concerned about these health complaints, distributed an unofficial questionnaire asking members if they had health concerns. In March 1992, the ARCOM surgeon examined some of the members who were complaining of health problems.

By early spring 1992, the ARCOM was aware of 125 members who had health concerns. Those concerns included fatigue, joint pain, skin rashes, and loss of memory. In response to the Surgeon General's directive, the Walter Reed team visited the ARCOM headquarters on April 11 and 12, 1992, to examine the soldiers. The ARCOM attempted to schedule appointments for all 125 soldiers; 79 reported for the examination. According to ARCOM officials, the remaining 46 were not examined for a variety of reasons, including scheduling conflicts—the appointments were made on fairly short notice.

Military Status

Sixty-one of the 89 respondents to our survey reported that they were still in the military on active duty or in a Selected Reserve or National Guard unit; 47 were still in the ARCOM. Of the 28 who indicated that they were no longer on active duty or in units, 20 reported that they had Persian Gulf-related health problems at the time they left their units. Of those, 12 said that these health problems contributed to some extent to their separation from the military; 1 of these reported being denied reenlistment because of weight, and 1 reported being discharged before being eligible for reenlistment.

Although the military can discharge a reservist for medical reasons, an ARCOM official said he was unaware of any members discharged involuntarily because of health problems that may have been caused by service in the Persian Gulf. Additionally, in June 1994, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness asked the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force to direct that no service member with symptoms "associated with Persian Gulf illness" be discharged unless he or she requests it in writing or he or she can be medically retired or separated. In October 1994, the National Defense Authorization Act for 1995 (P.L. 103-337, Oct. 5, 1994) provided a presumption that a Persian Gulf veteran who is ill became ill as a result of service in the Persian Gulf, unless medical evidence establishes another cause, and specifies that such a presumption can be used in disability determinations. DOD officials explained that passage of this act allowed service members with illnesses that could not be diagnosed to be medically retired or separated, with

appropriate benefits, because of those illnesses; without the new presumption, such members could only receive benefits if a specific diagnosis could be made.

Current Health Status

Most respondents continued to have health problems and reported having those problems within the 6 months prior to completing our survey. The problems indicated by most respondents are similar to the symptoms reported to the Walter Reed research team. At least two-thirds of the respondents reported chronic fatigue, achy joints, short-term memory loss, headaches, difficulty concentrating, nervousness or irritability, inability to sleep through the night, and depression.

Most respondents reported that these health problems limited their activities to some extent. They most frequently cited limitations in vigorous activities; climbing several flights of stairs; or in bending, kneeling, or stooping. They least often cited limitations in less vigorous types of activities, like walking a block or bathing and dressing. Nineteen reported that they were limited to a great extent in performing one or more types of activity. However, most reported that they had worked within the 6 months prior to completing the survey. Fifty-three reported that during that time period they missed no days of work for health reasons, but 9 said they were unable to work at all during that period.

Most, but not all, respondents attributed their health problems to Persian Gulf service. Eighty-one reported that they were currently experiencing health problems associated with that service; 76 reported that, overall, their health was worse than shortly before they went to the Persian Gulf.² Sixty-nine respondents said that health problems, which they believed were caused to some extent by their Persian Gulf service, limited their physical (56) or social activities (57). Most of those 69 reported that they had worked within the 6 months prior to completing the survey. Thirty-four reported that during that time period they had missed no days of work for health reasons, but four said they were unable to work at all.

Additionally, 23 respondents reported that family members or individuals they lived with were experiencing health problems the veteran believed were related to the veteran's Persian Gulf service. The veterans reported that these individuals had a wide range of problems including fatigue, achy joints, irritability, and depression. One respondent indicated that he

²Forty-one described their health as fair or poor; only 14 described their health as very good or better. Overall, the veterans who are no longer on active duty or in Reserve or Guard units reported health problems that are similar to those who are still in the service.

believed his child had developed cancer as a result of the respondent's service in the Persian Gulf.

Medical Care Provided to Persian Gulf War Veterans

We obtained information about several kinds of medical care that was available to these Persian Gulf War veterans:

- stress management training recommended by the Walter Reed team for ARCOM members,
- special examinations offered by VA and DOD for Persian Gulf veterans to help identify their concerns and ensure appropriate treatment, and
- other medical care they may have received in VA and DOD facilities as well as care outside these two medical systems.

Because some veterans told us they were unaware of one or more of these services, we also discussed with VA and DOD officials efforts to inform Persian Gulf veterans of the services available to them.

Follow-Up to Walter Reed Study

The Walter Reed study team recommended that the ARCOM continue to provide stress management evaluation and intervention, which the ARCOM had initiated earlier, to members who had been deployed.³ In response to our survey, 33 reported receiving stress management counseling from the ARCOM. In total, 45 respondents said that they had received stress management counseling from DOD, VA, or other sources.

ARCOM records indicated that medical personnel from the ARCOM's 55th Medical (Psychiatric) Detachment, assisted by psychiatrists, offered stress management training to three ARCOM units in Lafayette and Scottsburg, Indiana. These units included approximately 360 of the 1,200 who deployed. An ARCOM official told us that the ARCOM had limited resources and offered stress management to these units because they were the first in which concerns were raised.

ARCOM records indicated that on May 16, 1992, personnel from the medical detachment met with the 417th Quartermaster Company in Scottsburg, Indiana. Seventy-five members of the company, which deployed 126 reservists, and 8 family members participated in the session. Also, on June 13 and 14, 1992, medical detachment personnel met with the 209th

³The Walter Reed team made specific recommendations for follow-up care for a few people, either further tests for parasitic infestation or psychological evaluation for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. ARCOM officials said that they made the necessary referrals for the needed care but that they do not know whether the veterans actually sought and obtained the care.

Service and Support Company in Lafayette, Indiana. About 110 members of that unit, which deployed 171 reservists, and 7 family members attended this session. In both cases the format of the meetings included (1) large group discussions with both unit and family members, (2) small group discussions, and (3) individual counseling upon request. Officials also sought help from other sources outside the ARCOM, such as chaplains. Officials could not provide information on participation at a third session they said was held with the 300th Supply and Support Battalion.

Special Examinations for Persian Gulf Veterans

Many of the veterans who responded to our survey received the special examinations offered by VA and DOD for Persian Gulf veterans. However, some were not aware of these services.

The Persian Gulf War Veterans' Health Status Act (P.L. 102-585, Nov. 4, 1992) directed VA to establish a Persian Gulf War Veterans' Health Registry, and authorized special health examinations for veterans of the Persian Gulf War. Any veteran who served during the Persian Gulf War is eligible for this examination. VA had begun providing examinations in September 1992, before enactment of the legislation, and by January 1995, about 40,000 had been given. Initial examinations are given at VA medical centers or clinics by physicians specifically charged with conducting these examinations. If after the initial examination the veteran still has an unexplained illness, the veteran may be referred to specialists for additional examinations and, ultimately, to one of three VA Persian Gulf referral centers. Forty-six respondents reported receiving the VA examination; two more had appointments to receive it.

DOD began giving examinations, called Comprehensive Clinical Evaluation Program (CCEP) examinations, to Persian Gulf veterans in June 1994. The examination protocol has three phases; the second and third phases are given if additional care or diagnostics are needed.⁴ By the end of 1994 DOD reported that 1,000 examinations had been completed and another 8,000 were at various stages. DOD instructions issued in June 1994 indicated that active duty members, certain retirees, and reservists who are on active duty seeking an examination should go to a military medical facility. Other reserve members and retirees have the option of seeking an examination

⁴In June 1994 VA recommended to medical facilities that if a diagnosis is not made after the registry examination and other routine medical evaluations, the CCEP protocol is to be followed. This encourages more thorough examination at the local medical facility, reducing the need for the veteran to travel to one of the referral centers. The information letter with this recommendation noted that the CCEP protocol had been developed for use in VA's referral centers and had been adapted for use by both VA and DOD.

at military facilities or VA medical centers. All other Persian Gulf veterans are to seek an examination at VA medical centers. Fourteen respondents reported receiving the CCEP examination; 1 had an appointment to receive it.

Overall, more than half of the respondents (49) had received the VA or DOD examination; 11 reported receiving both. Of the 47 respondents still in the ARCOM, 38 had received the VA or the DOD examination. Respondents gave a variety of reasons for not receiving the examinations. Relatively few (6 for VA and 4 for DOD) said that they could not get an appointment at a convenient time or that the facility was too far away. Most frequently respondents said that they were unaware of the examinations. Of all respondents, 20 were unaware of the VA examination; most (67) were unaware of the DOD examination.

Other Care Received From VA, DOD, and Other Sources

Sixty-two respondents reported that they had received medical care—other than the VA or DOD special examinations—for health problems they believe were caused by their Persian Gulf service. Some received care from more than one source, but more veterans received care from outside VA and DOD than from VA or DOD facilities.

Public Law 103-210 (Dec. 20, 1993) authorized VA to provide health care services on a priority basis to Persian Gulf veterans if VA (1) determines that they may have been exposed to toxins or environmental hazards while serving in the Persian Gulf and (2) does not determine that the veterans' health problems were caused by factors other than that possible exposure. Before this legislation, these veterans were not eligible for care in VA hospitals without reimbursement unless VA had determined that their health problems were service connected or they met other eligibility requirements such as income criteria. Those on active duty are eligible for care for all health problems in DOD facilities; and those still in the reserves are eligible for health care at DOD facilities only for health-related problems that occurred, or were aggravated, while on active duty. Those no longer in the military are eligible for care from VA but not from DOD.

Of the 62 who reported receiving care for health problems they believed to be related to Persian Gulf service, 47 got care in the civilian sector (20 got care only from the civilian sector), and 42 got care from VA (33) or DOD (24). Whatever the source, most veterans received care as an outpatient.

Most reported getting less than half of the care they believe they need for their Persian Gulf-related health problems. Sixty-three veterans reported that they need care for these health problems, but fewer than half of these (29) were under a physician's care at the time of our survey.

Thirty-six reported that they were not receiving care from VA but would like to; 44 reported that they were not receiving care from DOD but would like to. The reason most often cited for not receiving care was that they were not aware they were eligible for it—14 did not know they were eligible for VA care; 29 did not know they were eligible for DOD care.⁵ Relatively few (7 for VA and 6 for DOD) reported that they had not received care because the facilities were too far away or they could not get an appointment at a convenient time.

VA and DOD Outreach Efforts

Both VA and DOD have undertaken outreach efforts to publicize the examinations and other services available to Persian Gulf veterans. Some efforts began before our survey, and others are planned or began after our survey was conducted in response to recent legislation and concerns we raised during our study.

VA Outreach

VA headquarters outreach has been done primarily through veterans service organizations; a computer bulletin board; public service announcements; and published literature, chiefly the Persian Gulf Review. VA officials told us that this newsletter is sent to all veterans who have received the VA exam, to veterans service organizations, and to veterans who ask to be on the mailing list; it is also being placed in waiting rooms in VA medical centers. However, officials said that local efforts are more important in informing veterans of the examinations and care available. Officials at the Indianapolis VA medical center told us that the center's Persian Gulf Coordinator had visited every National Guard and Reserve unit in Indiana to describe medical care available to Persian Gulf veterans and pass out literature. He also arranged for public service announcements, was interviewed on local radio and television, and conducted a variety of other local outreach activities.⁶ Also, in

⁵While all Persian Gulf veterans are eligible for care in VA facilities for problems possibly related to exposure to toxins or environmental hazards during Persian Gulf service (and not found to have other causes), not all are eligible for DOD care. Most of those who said they did not know they were eligible for DOD care, in fact, may not be. For example, most reservists not on active duty and those no longer associated with the military are not eligible for DOD care beyond the CCEP examination.

⁶After we discussed the results of our survey with the Persian Gulf Coordinator at the Indianapolis VA medical center, he agreed to contact those respondents who told us they were unaware of services, to explain their eligibility for the special medical examinations and other medical care available from VA and DOD.

January 1993 the ARCOM Command Executive Officer sent a memorandum to ARCOM unit heads requiring them to notify unit members that the VA examination was available.

The Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act (P.L. 103-446, Nov. 2, 1994) requires that VA implement a program to inform veterans and their families of the medical care and other benefits that may be provided by VA and DOD arising from service in the Persian Gulf War, as well as the results of research related to Persian Gulf illnesses. This program is to communicate information through a toll-free telephone number and a semiannual newsletter to all those on the Persian Gulf War Health Registry. The registry was authorized in November 1992 by the Persian Gulf War Veterans Health Status Act, which specified five groups who were to be included: Persian Gulf veterans who (1) had requested the VA examination, (2) had applied for medical service in VA medical facilities, (3) had filed a claim for compensation for a disability that might be related to Persian Gulf service, (4) had died and are survived by a claimant for VA dependency and indemnity compensation, or (5) had received the DOD special examination and asked to be included in the VA registry.⁷

VA is continuing publication of the Persian Gulf Review. However, at the time of our study, VA did not have in one place a registry with the names of all the required veterans in the five groups—although officials indicated they had access to the names in all five groups. The newsletter was being sent to veterans who had received the VA special examination, but not to members of the other groups the law required to be included in the registry. After we discussed these issues with VA officials, they indicated that they were taking steps to consolidate the registry list and to mail the newsletter and other information to an expanded number of veterans. This could have substantial impact. For example, while only about 40,000 veterans had received the VA special examination, and therefore were receiving information from VA, VA indicated that another 110,000 Persian Gulf veterans had received inpatient or outpatient care from VA. VA officials told us that they expected to have a complete registry and to mail required information to all on the registry by the end of May 1995.

VA also instituted the toll-free telephone information service, required by the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act, in February 1995. Officials reported that about 29,000 veterans had called the number in the first

⁷The act also required VA, from time to time, to provide veterans on the registry with information concerning significant developments in research on the health consequences of military service in the Persian Gulf.

month of operation. They believed that this indicated the outreach mechanism was having a substantial impact.

DOD Outreach

DOD has also taken steps to publicize services available to Persian Gulf veterans. For example, in May 1994 DOD sent a memorandum to Persian Gulf veterans notifying them that they were eligible for an examination and how to arrange for one. DOD sent the memorandum by mail to retirees and those who had left the military. DOD officials stated that they went to considerable lengths to find up-to-date mailing addresses for these people, including purchasing addresses from a private credit reporting firm. DOD also sent the memorandum to the services for distribution through command channels to active duty and reserve members. However, during our review, DOD officials determined that the services had sent the memorandum to active duty units but not to reserve units, instead relying on public communication channels to inform reservists. Officials of the ARCOM told us that they had not received information about the CCEP from Reserve headquarters. DOD officials indicated that it is often difficult for them to reach members of reserve units because the units are so dispersed nationally.

Additionally, in June 1994 DOD initiated a toll-free number for Persian Gulf veterans. Callers to this hotline receive information about the special examinations and other medical care available from VA and DOD and are referred to medical facilities to receive the VA or DOD examination, if they so desire. However, in April 1995 an ARCOM official told us he was unaware of either the DOD or VA hot line.

In October 1994 the National Defense Authorization Act for 1995 required that DOD establish an outreach program for those in the military who served in the Persian Gulf. Among other things, DOD is to inform them of (1) illnesses that might be associated with Persian Gulf service, (2) counseling and medical care available to them from DOD and VA, and (3) procedures for being put on the VA registry or another registry, the Persian Gulf War Health Surveillance System, managed by DOD.⁸ DOD officials emphasized that, in addition to the memorandums and the telephone hot line discussed, they are continuing extensive contacts with media and with veteran and military organizations. They noted that the toll-free number was receiving about 400 calls per week, indicating, they believed, that outreach efforts are effective.

⁸This act also required DOD to provide information on all individuals who were registered in DOD's registry to VA for inclusion in the VA registry. DOD provided this information to VA in April 1995.

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD officials outlined other outreach activities they are planning. These include the following:

- DOD plans to publish research findings in both scientific and medical journals and general media. Specific publication methods have not yet been decided. Agency officials do not expect research findings to be available until early 1996.
- Another toll-free telephone number will be established to answer questions and provide information to veterans about their individual circumstances, such as unit locations and possible exposures.
- DOD plans to develop information to send directly to reserve units to inform reservists about available health services, such as the CCEP and hot line.

Satisfaction With Care Received

Of those who received care through VA and DOD, most were dissatisfied with it. Many of the veterans were dissatisfied with the special examinations they were given. Of the 46 who had received the VA examination, 28 were dissatisfied with it. Likewise, 7 of the 14 who had received the DOD examination were dissatisfied with it. Most respondents were also dissatisfied with the other care they received from VA and DOD medical facilities. Of the 33 who had received other care from VA, 22 were dissatisfied; 13 of 24 were dissatisfied with the other care from DOD. In contrast, more veterans were satisfied than dissatisfied with care received outside VA and DOD. Of the 47 who had received care outside DOD and VA, 7 reported being dissatisfied.

The following table compares veterans' satisfaction with selected aspects of care in VA and DOD, and outside VA and DOD.

Table 1: Veterans' Satisfaction With Selected Aspects of Care

Aspect of care	Number who rated care fair or poor		
	VA (n=33)	DOD (n=24)	Other (n=47)
Ability to diagnose problem	26	21	21
Outcome of care received; how much it helped	26	20	22
Attention providers gave to what respondent said	23	16	6

VA officials told us that dissatisfaction with care does not necessarily mean that the care was of poor quality. They noted, for example, that if these individuals believed they were sick and were not improved or cured, they might be dissatisfied, even if the medical provider had done all that was

possible to diagnose and treat the problem. They also noted that satisfaction with physicians' ability to diagnose problems should not be viewed as an indication of the accuracy of the diagnosis. These officials suggested that the initial assessment by the Walter Reed team—that many of the health problems were caused by stress—was not accepted by many of the veterans examined, and that this initial assessment may also have colored veterans' overall satisfaction with both DOD and VA health care. Additionally, many of these veterans might have received care in 1992 or 1993, before DOD began the CCEP examination and before VA expanded the protocol for the examination provided at local medical facilities.

Summary

Most of the respondents, all of whom had expressed concerns about their health in 1992, reported that they continued to have health problems they believed were related to service in the Persian Gulf. Over half had taken advantage of medical services, either the special examinations or other health care, available to them through DOD and VA. However, despite VA and DOD efforts to provide health examinations and care to these veterans and to inform them of these services, many respondents were either unaware of services or dissatisfied with them. Whether changes made in outreach and services will alleviate the concerns these veterans reported to us is unknown.

Agency Comments


In a letter dated April 17, 1995, commenting on a draft of this report, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs expressed concern that readers would misinterpret the report findings. (See app. III.) He was concerned that readers would generalize the findings about this small group of Persian Gulf veterans to all Persian Gulf veterans and that the readers would consider these veterans' perceptions of care as conclusive evidence about care received. As stated in the report, we agree that the responses of the 89 veterans cannot be generalized to any larger population and that the information on health status and health care received was based on veterans' memories and perceptions.

DOD officials, including the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Clinical Services, provided comments on the draft in an April 18, 1995, meeting. The officials said that they generally concurred with the information in the report, but expressed concern similar to that expressed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs about the possibility that readers would generalize our findings beyond the 89 respondents. The officials

also outlined additional outreach efforts that were being planned; we incorporated that information into the report.

We are sending copies of this report to interested congressional committees, the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs, and other interested parties.

This work was done under the supervision of Ruth Ann Heck, Assistant Director. Other major contributors were William Stanco, Edward Murphy, and Clarita Mrena. Please call me on (202) 512-7101 or Ms. Heck on (202) 512-7007 if you have any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David P. Baine". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "D".

David P. Baine
Director, Federal Health Care
Delivery Issues

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Abbreviations

ARCOM	123rd Army Reserve Command
CCEP	Comprehensive Clinical Evaluation Program
DOD	Department of Defense
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs

Survey Scope and Methodology

Survey Population

Much of the information contained in this report is based on a survey we conducted with 125 of the 1,200 reservists from the 123rd Army Reserve Command (ARCOM) who were deployed to the Persian Gulf during Operation Desert Storm. These 125 reservists were scheduled to be evaluated in 1992 by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in response to concerns about their health that they expressed just after returning from the Persian Gulf.

Data Collection

To collect the data, we designed a mail questionnaire that included questions regarding the reservists' current military status; health status; participation in special VA and DOD examinations; other health care received from VA, DOD, and other providers; opinions about the quality of the care received; and satisfaction with that care. To determine reservists' current health status, we included a list of possible health problems. This list was adapted from items on a medical questionnaire developed by the Epidemiology Consultant Service within the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research and administered to those reservists from the ARCOM who were evaluated by the Institute in April 1992. The contents of the questionnaire were discussed with VA and DOD officials. The questionnaire itself was pretested with several members of the ARCOM. On the basis of these discussions and the pretests, the questionnaire was revised accordingly.

To develop the mailing list for the veterans in our survey, we used databases maintained by the ARCOM, DOD's Office of Reserve Affairs, the VA medical center in Indianapolis, and VA's central information system. The questionnaire was first mailed to the reservists on October 28, 1994. Those who did not respond to the initial mailing were sent a second questionnaire. Subsequent to mailing out the questionnaire, we learned that 2 of the 125 reservists had passed away—one prior to the start of our survey, the other shortly after our first mailing. Eighty-nine of the remaining 123 reservists (72 percent) completed and returned our questionnaire. The information obtained through this survey pertains to only these 89 respondents and cannot be generalized to any other population.

Data from surveys such as ours rely on respondents' memories. Because of the extensive resources that would be involved, we did not conduct examinations or review medical files to verify the health status these veterans reported. As a limited check on the accuracy of the responses provided, we compared information available in VA and DOD automated records to respondents' answers about

-
- their current military status,
 - whether they had received the special examinations offered by VA and DOD, and
 - whether they had received inpatient or outpatient care in VA facilities.

It was not feasible to compare responses regarding care received from DOD health facilities to DOD data because DOD medical records for the reservists are not centrally located. Taking into account that VA and DOD records did not always cover the same time periods addressed in our questionnaire, those survey responses we could compare with existing data are generally consistent with VA and DOD records.

Nonresponse Analysis

We also used automated information from these VA and DOD records to compare those who responded to our survey with those who did not.

Nonrespondents and respondents were similar in many ways. About the same proportion of each group

- were still in the military at the time of our survey,
- were examined by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research team in 1992, and
- had received outpatient care from VA since returning from the Persian Gulf.

In other ways, however, respondents and nonrespondents were different. Over one-third of the respondents received VA's special Persian Gulf examination, as opposed to about one-fifth of the nonrespondents. Also, a few of the respondents were admitted to a VA medical facility from fiscal years 1991 to 1993, but none of the nonrespondents was admitted during that time.

Summary of Questionnaire Responses

U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE *

Survey of Reservists Who Served in the Persian Gulf War

INTRODUCTION

The General Accounting Office (GAO) has been asked by several members of the United States Congress to collect information from 125 of the Reservists from the 123d ARCOM who served in the Persian Gulf War. These 125 Reservists were scheduled to receive an examination in 1992 from the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in response to concerns about their health that they expressed just after returning from the Persian Gulf. The Congress would like information about the current health of these Reservists, the health care they've received since returning from the Persian Gulf, and their satisfaction with that care. To collect this information the GAO is sending this questionnaire to all 125 of these Reservists.

According to ARCOM records, you are one of the Reservists the Congress would like us to contact. Please complete and return this questionnaire to us within ONE WEEK of the day you receive it. Your answers to our questions are important even if you have no concerns about your health. We can provide complete information to the Congress about the experiences of members of the 123d ARCOM only if you and the others who receive this questionnaire complete it.

INSTRUCTIONS

Completing this Questionnaire:

It should take about 15 to 20 minutes to complete this questionnaire. Almost all of these questions can be answered simply by checking a box. One or two ask you to write a few words.

Following the Skip Instructions:

Next to many of the answers, there are skip instructions that tell you which question to answer next. These instructions are designed to help you skip over those questions that don't apply to you so that you can complete this questionnaire as quickly and easily as possible.

** This questionnaire was sent to 125 of the reservists from the 123d ARCOM who were deployed to the Persian Gulf during Operation Desert Storm. Eighty-nine completed and returned the questionnaire. The number that appears next to or, in the case of matrix questions, under each response category is the number of respondents who gave that answer. Mean and Median are provided for the question about the respondent's age, and the question about the number of work days the respondent missed. Not all of those who responded answer every question. The "n" that appears after each question is the total number of respondents who answered it.*

Topics this Questionnaire Covers:

This questionnaire contains several sections, each covering a separate topic. Section one asks for background information about yourself and your military status.

Sections two and three contain questions about your health and the health of your family members.

The next two sections cover the special medical evaluations offered to those who served in the Persian Gulf War, first by the VA and now by the military.

Sections six, seven, and eight all contain similar questions about the health care you've received since returning from the Persian Gulf War. Section six asks about health care you've received from the VA, section seven about care received from the military, and section eight about care outside the VA and the military.

Section nine includes questions about VA disability benefits. The last section gives you space to write any comments you might have.

Returning this Questionnaire:

Please complete and return this questionnaire within ONE WEEK of receipt to the:

U.S. General Accounting Office
NGB/FHCD
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Attention: William Stanco

A postage-paid, business reply envelope is enclosed for your convenience. If you have any questions about this survey, please call William Stanco or Ruth Ann Heck on (800) 439-3728. Thank you for your prompt response!

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

SECTION ONE: Background Information

1. Did you serve in Southwest Asia during the Persian Gulf War? **n=88**

88 Yes

0 No -----> *If no, stop here and return this questionnaire. The rest of the questions will not apply to you. We would like to know your answer to this first question, however, so please return this questionnaire, and we thank you for your help.*

2. When did you leave for Southwest Asia and when did you return? (Enter month and year for each.) **n=85**

Left: / / --- / /
month year

Returned: / / --- / /
month year

3. How old were you on your last birthday? (Enter number.) **n=88**

_____ years old **median=33**
mean=35

4. At this time, are you a member of a Reserve unit, the National Guard, or an active duty member of the U.S. Armed Services? (Check one.) **n=89**

47 Yes, the 123d ARCOM

8 Yes, some other Reserve unit

5 Yes, the National Guard

1 Yes, an active duty member of the U.S. Armed Services

----> *If yes, skip to question 10.*

28 No, not a member of a Reserve unit, the National Guard, or the U.S. Armed Services ----> *If no, continue to question 5.*

5. Under what circumstances did you leave the military? (Check one.) **n=28**

7 Retired

2 Discharged before up for re-enlistment (Please specify why.)

1 Denied re-enlistment because of weight or inability to pass PT

2 Denied re-enlistment for other reasons

10 Chose not to re-enlist

6 Other (Please specify.)

6. At the time you left the military were you experiencing any health problems? **n=28**

22 Yes

6 No ----> *If no, skip to question 9.*

7. To what extent, if any, was your discharge or retirement because of these health problems? (Check one.) **n=22**

10 To little or no extent

5 To some extent

4 To a moderate extent

2 To a great extent

1 To a very great extent

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

8. In your opinion, were the health problems you were experiencing when you were discharged or retired from the military caused by your service in the Persian Gulf War? (*Check one.*) **n=22**

0 Definitely no
1 Probably no
9 Probably yes
11 Definitely yes
1 No basis to judge

9. Since leaving the military, have you tried to re-enlist?
n=28

1 Yes
27 No

10. After returning from the Persian Gulf War, did you receive any stress management counseling from:
(*Check one box for each.*)

	YES	NO
	n=81	
...the 123d ARCOM?	33	48
...somewhere else in the military?	n=53	
	3	50
...the VA?	n=57	
	13	44
...somewhere outside the military and VA? (<i>Please specify.</i>)	n=56	
	10	46

SECTION TWO: Questions about your Health

11. Would you say your health, in general, is excellent, very good, good, fair or poor? (*Check one.*) **n=89**

2 Excellent
12 Very good
34 Good
33 Fair
8 Poor

12. Compared to your health shortly before going to Southwest Asia for the Persian Gulf War, is your health now better, about the same, or worse? (*Check one.*)
n=89

0 Much better now
1 Somewhat better now
12 About the same
56 Somewhat worse now
20 Much worse now

**Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses**

13. Listed below are several health problems. *

In **PART A**, indicate whether or not you've experienced each of these at any time since returning from the Persian Gulf War. (Check one box for each.)

|
|

If "yes" ----> For each problem you have experienced at any time since returning from the Persian Gulf:

In **PART B**, indicate whether or not you've experienced that problem at any time during the last six months.

In **PART C**, indicate whether or not you experienced that problem before serving in the Persian Gulf.

In **PART D**, indicate whether or not that problem was caused, in your opinion, by your service in the Persian Gulf.

	PART A Since returning?		PART B Within the last six months?		PART C Before serving in the Persian Gulf?		Part D Caused by service in the Persian Gulf?				
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Definitely No	Probably no	Probably yes	Definitely yes	No basis to judge
Headaches	18	69	1	65	45	20	1	10	30	12	11
Nose bleeds	60	24	6	17	14	10	3	7	5	1	7
Ringing or pain in an ear	40	45	3	39	37	4	0	4	21	12	5
Hearing loss	52	33	5	26	25	5	1	2	14	12	2
Abnormal hair loss	61	24	5	18	22	1	0	0	8	10	5
Painful or achy joints	16	72	3	64	58	9	2	4	27	31	4
Diarrhea	31	55	2	49	33	19	1	11	17	14	9
Nausea	54	30	3	23	21	5	0	3	12	6	7
Constipation	57	25	1	24	17	7	2	4	11	8	1
Intestinal discomfort or abdominal pain	34	52	2	46	43	4	0	3	24	16	7
Urinary tract infections	74	10	1	7	7	3	0	1	2	6	2

* The "n" for each question within this matrix is not provided. To calculate the "n" for each question, total the number of responses across all response categories for the question.

**Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses**

	<u>PART A</u> Since returning?		<i>If "yes" ----></i>	<u>PART B</u> Within the last six months?		<u>PART C</u> Before serving in the Persian Gulf?		<u>Part D</u> Caused by service in the Persian Gulf?				
	No	Yes		No	Yes	No	Yes	Definitely No	Probably no	Probably yes	Definitely yes	No basis to judge
Change in sex drive	41	45		4	38	37	4	0	4	18	12	9
Blackouts or lost time	57	25		5	18	22	1	1	0	12	9	2
Seizures	80	2		1	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	0
Muscle spasms	40	43		4	37	34	7	1	0	16	14	10
Poor circulation	46	33		1	31	26	4	0	3	11	13	3
Loss of muscle mass in your legs or forearms	57	26		3	19	23	1	0	2	10	12	1
Chronic or productive cough	54	30		4	24	25	3	1	1	11	10	4
Chronic fatigue or tiredness	12	75		4	67	68	3	0	0	31	35	6
An inability to sleep through the night	28	61		4	54	52	6	0	4	20	23	10
Eye sensitivity to indoor or outdoor light	33	52		4	45	38	11	0	5	24	14	7
Stiff neck	39	46		2	41	37	4	0	4	19	12	6
Sore throat	57	27		3	24	13	12	2	6	9	5	5
Swollen or tender lymph glands	55	27		2	24	19	5	0	1	8	10	7
Difficulty with your depth perception	49	34		1	30	26	4	0	4	9	10	9

**Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses**

	<u>PART A</u> Since returning?		<i>If "yes" -----></i>	<u>PART B</u> Within the last six months?		<u>PART C</u> Before serving in the Persian Gulf?		<u>Part D</u> Caused by service in the Persian Gulf?				
	No	Yes		No	Yes	No	Yes	Definitely No	Probably no	Probably yes	Definitely yes	No basis to judge
Bleeding gums, tooth pain or feeling mushy in the gums	38	48		6	39	32	8	1	8	16	14	6
Short term memory loss or forgetfulness	17	70		5	61	58	3	0	3	26	29	7
Difficulty concentrating or thinking	21	67		3	61	57	3	0	3	28	23	9
Depression	27	61		7	51	48	4	0	4	21	23	6
Nervousness or irritability for no apparent reason	21	67		6	57	55	3	0	5	26	24	6
Feelings of anxiety or fearfulness	39	48		4	41	37	4	0	4	19	17	3
Numbness in any part of your body	38	48		1	44	36	6	1	2	18	18	6
High or low grade fever	51	33		6	26	23	5	0	3	10	12	6
Unintentional weight gain or loss	40	45		7	35	34	5	2	2	17	15	6
High or low blood pressure	63	21		2	19	19	2	1	1	7	8	3
Skin rashes or other skin problems	37	49		9	39	41	4	0	1	19	24	3
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY.) _____	3	16		1	15	15	1	0	0	4	11	1

**Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses**

14. Are you male or female? *n=89*

71 Male ---> If male, skip to question 16.

18 Female

15. Listed below are health problems that apply to women. *

In **PART A**, indicate whether or not you've experienced each of these problems at **any time since returning** from the Persian Gulf War. (Check one box for each.)

|
|

If "yes" ----> For each problem you have experienced at any time since returning from the Persian Gulf:

In **PART B**, indicate whether or not you've experienced that problem at any time **during the last six months**.

In **PART C**, indicate whether or not you experienced that problem **before serving in the Persian Gulf**.

In **PART D**, indicate whether or not that problem was **caused, in your opinion, by your service in the Persian Gulf War**.

	<u>PART A</u> Since returning?			<u>PART B</u> Within the last six months?		<u>PART C</u> Before serving in the Persian Gulf?		<u>Part D</u> Caused by service in the Persian Gulf?				
	No	Yes	If "yes" ---->	No	Yes	No	Yes	Definitely No	Probably no	Probably yes	Definitely yes	No basis to judge
Excessive menstrual bleeding or severe cramping	10	7		0	7	4	3	0	1	3	1	2
Irregular menstrual cycles	11	6		0	6	5	1	0	0	2	1	3
Miscarriage	15	1		1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Recurring yeast infections	9	9		1	8	5	4	0	0	3	2	3

* The "n" for each question within this matrix is not provided. To calculate the "n" for each question, total the number of responses across all response categories for the question.

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

16. Because of your health, are you limited to any degree in engaging in each of the following activities and, if so, how much?
(Check one box for each.)

	No, not limited at all	Yes, slightly limited	Yes, moderately limited	Yes, greatly limited
Vigorous activities such as running, lifting heavy objects, participating in strenuous sports	30	21	20	17
Moderate activities such as moving a table, pushing a vacuum cleaner, bowling or playing golf	65	12	6	3
Lifting or carrying groceries	69	12	4	3
Climbing several flights of stairs	37	28	15	7
Climbing one flight of stairs	63	15	4	6
Bending, kneeling, or stooping	39	23	17	7
Walking more than a mile	57	18	5	8
Walking several blocks	62	12	7	4
Walking one block	74	8	2	3
Bathing or dressing yourself	79	4	2	1

17. Did you indicate in the previous question that you were limited, to any degree, in engaging in any of the activities listed? (Check one.) **n=87**

65 Yes

22 No ---> If no, skip to question 19.

18. To what extent, if any, are the limitations you indicated related to health problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? (Check one.) **n=64**

8 To little or no extent

17 To some extent

17 To a moderate extent

10 To a great extent

12 To a very great extent

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

19. During the last six months to what extent, if any, have problems with your health interfered with your normal social activities with family, friends, or groups?
(Check one.) **n=89**

30 To little or no extent ---> *If little or no, skip to question 21.*

27 To some extent

15 To a moderate extent

11 To a great extent

6 To a very great extent

20. Over the last six months, when your health interfered with your normal social activities, how often was this related to health problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? (Check one.) **n=59**

2 Rarely, if ever

24 Sometimes

6 About half the time

15 Most times

12 Always or almost always

21. Have you worked at a job or business at any time during the last six months? **n=88**

82 Yes

6 No

22. Over the last six months, were there any days when you were unable to work because of your health? **n=87**

34 Yes

53 No ---> *If no, skip to question 25.*

23. About how many days over the last six months were you unable to work because of your health?
(Enter number or check a box.) **n=21**

median=5

mean=7

Unable to work _____ days over the last six months

-OR-

n=12

9 Unable to work at all over the last six months

3 Can't recall

24. Over the last six months, when you were unable to work because of your health, how often was it because of problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? (Check one.) **n=35**

5 Rarely, if ever

6 Sometimes

2 About half the time

11 Most times

11 Always or almost always

25. Are you currently experiencing any health problems that you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? **n=89**

81 Yes

8 No ---> *If no, skip to question 29.*

**Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses**

26. In your opinion, do you require some type of health care for any of these problems? (*Check one.*) **n=77**

- 1** Definitely no
- 5** Probably no
- 24** Probably yes
- 39** Definitely yes
- 8** No basis to judge

27. Are you currently under a physician's care for any health problem you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? **n=78**

- 29** Yes
- 49** No

28. In your opinion are you receiving all or almost all, most, about half, some, or little of the health care you need for health problems you believe were caused by service in the Persian Gulf? (*Check one.*) **n=75**

- 10** All or almost all the care needed
- 11** Most of the care needed
- 4** About half the care needed
- 10** Some of the care needed
- 40** Little of the care needed

SECTION THREE: Questions about Family Members' Health

29. Is your spouse, another family member, or an individual you live with experiencing any health problem that you believe is related to your service in the Persian Gulf? **n=83**

23 Yes

60 No ---> *If no, skip to Section Four on the next page.*

30. Which of the individuals listed below is experiencing a health problem you believe is related to your service in the Persian Gulf War, and what health problem is each experiencing? (*Check all that apply and briefly describe the problem in each case.*)

Health Problem

14 Spouse-----> _____

9 Child-----> _____

3 Other family member or individual you live with-----> _____

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

SECTION FOUR: The VA Registry for Those Who Served in the Persian Gulf War

This is the first of two sections about special medical evaluations provided to those who served in the Persian Gulf War. This section asks questions about the special evaluation offered by the VA. The next section contains similar questions, but about the special evaluation offered by the military.

31. The VA offers a special medical evaluation to people who served in the Persian Gulf so that it can assess the health of these individuals. When someone receives this evaluation from the VA, the VA places them on its list or "registry" of all those who have been given this special evaluation.

Did you know that the VA offers a special evaluation to those who served in the Persian Gulf? **n=85**

65 Yes --> If yes, continue to question 32.

20 No ---> If no, skip to question 42.

32. How did you hear about this evaluation?
(Check all that apply.) **n=67**

11 From the newspaper, radio or TV

35 From someone in the military

27 From someone from the VA

9 From a family member, friend, or someone else

3 Other (Please specify.)

33. Have you received the special medical evaluation the VA offers those who served in the Persian Gulf? **n=67**

46 Yes ---> If yes, skip to question 35.

21 No

34. Do you have an appointment scheduled to receive the evaluation VA offers those who served in the Persian Gulf? **n=20**

2 Yes --> If yes, skip to question 40.

18 No ---> If no, skip to question 42.

35. About how long was it from the day the VA was notified that you wanted this evaluation, to the day you received it? (Check one.) **n=46**

2 Less than 2 weeks

8 2 to less than 4 weeks

7 4 to less than 6 weeks

7 6 to less than 8 weeks

6 8 weeks or more (Specify number.) _____

16 Can't recall

36. How would you rate the thoroughness of the special evaluation you received from the VA? (Check one.) **n=45**

1 Excellent

8 Very Good

6 Good

15 Fair

15 Poor

37. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the special evaluation you received from the VA?
(Check one.) **n=46**

2 Very satisfied

9 More satisfied than dissatisfied

7 About as satisfied as dissatisfied

14 More dissatisfied than satisfied

14 Very dissatisfied

**Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses**

38. When you were given this evaluation by the VA, did they recommend that you receive additional exams, treatment, or care? **n=46**

28 Yes

18 No ---> *If no, skip to question 40.*

39. Have you received, or are you scheduled to receive, ANY of the additional exams, treatment or care the VA recommended? **n=28**

24 Yes

4 No

40. Now we'd like to know why you received, or are scheduled to receive, the special evaluation from the VA. Is it: (Check one box for each.)

...because you wanted care for health problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf?

YES	NO
n=47	
42	5

...to make sure you have no health problems related to your service in the Persian Gulf?

YES	NO
n=42	
28	14

...to be placed on VA's list of those who served in the Persian Gulf in case you develop health problems in the future?

YES	NO
n=44	
40	4

...for some other reason?
(Please specify.)

YES	NO
n=28	
5	23

41. About when did you receive, or when are you scheduled to receive, this special evaluation from the VA?
(Enter month and year or check the box.)

__/__/__
month year

---> Skip to Section Five on the next page.

-OR-

[] Can't recall

42. Would you like to receive the special medical evaluation the VA offers those who served in the Persian Gulf? **n=42**

38 Yes

4 No ---> *If no, skip to Section Five on the next page.*

43. Which of the statements below best describes why you have not received the evaluation the VA offers those who served in the Persian Gulf?
(Check one.) **n=36**

17 Didn't know the VA offers this evaluation

2 Didn't know I qualified for it

3 Just haven't gotten around to it yet

2 VA medical center is located too far away

4 Can't get an appointment when it's convenient

8 Other (Please specify.)

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

SECTION FIVE: The Military's Program for Those Who Served in the Persian Gulf War

This is the second of two sections about special medical evaluations offered to those who served in the Persian Gulf War. The previous section asked about the special evaluation offered by the VA. This section contains similar questions, but about the special evaluation offered by the military.

44. Like the VA, the military now offers a special medical evaluation for those who served in the Persian Gulf so that it can assess the health of these individuals. This medical evaluation is called the Comprehensive Clinical Evaluation Program (CCEP).

Did you know that the military offers a special medical evaluation to those who served in the Persian Gulf?
n=89

22 Yes --> *If yes, continue to question 45.*

67 No ---> *If no, skip to question 55.*

45. How did you hear about this evaluation?
(Check all that apply.) **n=22**

1 From the newspaper, radio or TV

14 From someone in the military

2 From someone from the VA

2 From a family member, friend or someone else

3 Other (Please specify.)

46. Have you gotten the special medical evaluation the military offers those who served in the Persian Gulf?
n=22

14 Yes ---> *If yes, skip to question 48.*

8 No

47. Do you have an appointment scheduled to receive the evaluation the military offers those who served in the Persian Gulf? **n=8**

1 Yes --> *If yes, skip to question 53.*

7 No ---> *If no, skip to question 55.*

48. About how long was it from the day the military was notified that you wanted this evaluation, to the day you received it? (Check one.) **n=13**

1 Less than 2 weeks

4 2 to less than 4 weeks

1 4 to less than 6 weeks

2 6 to less than 8 weeks

1 8 weeks or more (Specify number.) _____

4 Can't recall

49. How would you rate the thoroughness of the special evaluation you received from the military?
(Check one.) **n=12**

2 Excellent

2 Very Good

1 Good

3 Fair

4 Poor

50. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the special evaluation you received from the military?
(Check one.) **n=12**

1 Very satisfied

2 More satisfied than dissatisfied

2 About as satisfied as dissatisfied

4 More dissatisfied than satisfied

3 Very dissatisfied

**Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses**

51. When you were given this evaluation by the military, did they recommend that you receive additional exams, treatment, or care? **n=13**

7 Yes

6 No ---> If no, skip to question 53.

52. Have you received, or are you scheduled to receive, ANY of the additional exams, treatment or care from the military? **n=6**

3 Yes

3 No

53. Now we'd like to know why you received, or are scheduled to receive, this special evaluation from the military. Is it: (Check one box for each.)

...because you wanted care for health problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf?

YES	NO
n=12	
10	2

...to make sure you have no health problems related to your service in the Persian Gulf?

YES	NO
n=10	
8	2

...to be placed on the military's list of those who served in the Persian Gulf in case you develop health problems in the future?

YES	NO
n=10	
8	2

...for some other reason?
(Please specify.)

YES	NO
n=6	
2	4

54. About when did you receive, or when are you scheduled to receive, this special evaluation from the military?
(Enter month and year or check box.)

//_/---/_/_/_/ month year	---> Skip to <u>Section Six</u> on the next page.

-OR-

[] Can't recall

55. Would you like to receive the special medical evaluation the military offers those who served in the Persian Gulf War? **n=71**

59 Yes

12 No ---> If no, skip to Section Six on the next page.

56. Which of the statements below best describes why you have not received the evaluation the military offers those who served in the Persian Gulf War?
(Check one.) **n=56**

47 Didn't know the military offers this evaluation

1 Didn't know I qualified for it

2 Just haven't gotten around to it yet

2 Military medical center is located too far away

2 Can't get an appointment when it's convenient

2 Other (Please specify.)

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

SECTION SIX: VA Health Care

The last two sections were about the special medical evaluations the VA and military offer those who served in the Persian Gulf War. The next three sections all contain questions about other exams and health care that you've received since returning from the Persian Gulf for problems you believe were caused by your service there.

This section asks about exams and health care you've received from the VA. Section seven contains similar questions, but about health care you've received from the military. Section eight contains questions about exams and care outside the VA and the military.

57. Excluding the VA's special medical evaluation, since returning from the Persian Gulf have you received any exams or health care, from the VA for problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? (Check one.) **n=89**

33 Yes, I have
received other
exams or health
care from
the VA for
these problems-----If yes, continue to question 58.

56 No, I haven't received
any other exams or
health care from the
VA for these
problems-----If no, skip to question 65.

58. At any time since returning from the Persian Gulf, were you a patient for at least one night in a VA hospital for a health problem you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? **n=33**

4 Yes

29 No ---> If no, skip to question 60.

0 Can't recall --> If can't recall, skip to question 60.

59. How many times since returning from the Persian Gulf have you been a patient for at least one night in a VA hospital for a health problem you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf?

(Check one.) **n=3**

1 Once

2 Twice

0 Three times

0 More than three times (Specify number.)_____

0 Can't recall

60. At any time since returning from the Persian Gulf, have you visited a VA outpatient clinic or emergency room, either by appointment or on a walk-in basis, for a health problem you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? **n=33**

27 Yes

6 No ---> If no, skip to question 62.

0 Can't recall --> If can't recall, skip to question 62.

61. How many times since returning from the Persian Gulf have you visited a VA outpatient clinic or emergency room, either by appointment or on a walk-in basis, for a health problem you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? (Check one.) **n=26**

3 Once

1 Twice

3 Three times

14 More than three times (Specify number.)_____

5 Can't recall

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

62. Think about ALL the exams and health care you've received from the VA on an inpatient and outpatient basis for problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf. How would you rate the VA in each of the categories listed below? (Check one box for each category.)

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Not Applicable
Thoroughness of VA exams	2	5	5	14	6	0
VA's ability to diagnose your health problems	1	3	2	8	18	0
Skill of VA health care providers	2	5	11	11	4	0
Thoroughness of VA treatment	2	3	6	11	9	0
Outcome of the care you received from the VA; how much you were helped	2	2	2	13	13	1
Overall quality of VA health care	2	3	3	15	8	1
VA's explanation of medical tests	2	3	3	10	14	0
VA's explanation of health care procedures	2	3	2	11	11	3
Attention VA gave to what you had to say	1	4	5	9	14	0
Help VA gave you with arrangements to get the health care you needed	2	2	5	6	15	3

63. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the exams and health care you've received from the VA for problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? (Check one.) **n=31**

- 0** Very satisfied
- 6** More satisfied than dissatisfied
- 3** About as satisfied as dissatisfied
- 10** More dissatisfied than satisfied
- 12** Very dissatisfied

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

64. Do you feel the VA has provided all or almost all, most, about half, some, or little of what you need for health problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? (Check one.) **n=32**

1 All or almost all you need

4 Most of what you need

1 About half of what you need

10 Some of what you need

16 Little of what you need

---> Skip to Section Seven on the next page.

66. Which of the statements below best describes why you are not receiving care from the VA for these health problems? (Check one.) **n=32**

14 Didn't know I was eligible for VA health care

2 Haven't gotten around to going yet

3 VA medical center is located too far away

4 Can't get an appointment when it's convenient

9 Other (Please specify.)

65. Would you like to receive exams or health care from the VA for a health problem you have that you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? **n=51**

4 Not applicable-- have no health problems caused by service in the Persian Gulf ----->

If not applicable, skip to Section Seven on the next page.

11 No-----> If no, skip to Section Seven on the next page.

36 Yes-----> If yes, continue to question 66.

SECTION SEVEN: Military Health Care

This section contains questions similar to the ones in the last section but here we ask about exams and health care you've received from the military since returning from the Persian Gulf War.

67. Excluding the military's special medical evaluation, since returning from the Persian Gulf, have you received any other exams or health care from the military for problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? (Check one.) **n=86**

23 Yes, I have received other exams or health care from the military for these problems-->If yes, continue to question 68.

63 No, I haven't received any other exams or health care from the military for these problems----->If no, skip to question 75.

68. At any time since returning from the Persian Gulf, were you a patient for at least one night in a military hospital for a health problem you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? **n=25**

8 Yes

17 No --> If no, skip to question 70.

0 Can't recall --> If can't recall, skip to question 70.

69. How many times since returning from the Persian Gulf have you been a patient for at least one night in a military hospital for a health problem you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? (Check one.) **n=8**

5 Once

1 Twice

1 Three times

1 More than three times (Specify number.)_____

0 Can't recall

70. At any time since returning from the Persian Gulf, have you visited a military outpatient clinic or emergency room, either by appointment or on a walk-in basis, for a health problem you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? **n=24**

20 Yes

4 No --> If no, skip to question 72.

0 Can't recall --> If can't recall, skip to question 72.

71. How many times since returning from the Persian Gulf have you visited a military outpatient clinic or emergency room, either by appointment or on a walk-in basis, for a health problem you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? (Check one.) **n=20**

5 Once

3 Twice

2 Three times

8 More than three times (Specify number.)_____

2 Can't recall

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

72. Think about ALL the exams and health care you've received from the military on an inpatient and outpatient basis for problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf. How would you rate the military in each of the categories listed below? *(Check one box for each category.)*

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Not Applicable
Thoroughness of military exams	0	3	7	6	8	0
The military's ability to diagnose your health problems	0	2	0	11	10	1
Skill of military health care providers	0	2	10	7	4	1
Thoroughness of military treatment	0	2	4	8	9	1
Outcome of the care you received from the military; how much you were helped	0	0	3	8	12	1
Overall quality of military health care	0	2	6	7	9	0
The military's explanation of medical tests	0	3	2	4	15	0
The military's explanation of health care procedures	0	2	4	6	11	1
Attention the military gave to what you had to say	0	2	6	6	10	0
Help the military gave you with arrangements to get the health care you needed	1	1	2	5	14	1

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

73. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the exams and health care you've received from the military for problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? (Check one.) **n=25**

- 0 Very satisfied
- 2 More satisfied than dissatisfied
- 10 About as satisfied as dissatisfied
- 5 More dissatisfied than satisfied
- 8 Very dissatisfied

74. Do you feel the military has provided all or almost all, most, about half, some, or little of what you need for health problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf?
(Check one.) **n=23**

- 1 All or almost all you need
- 1 Most of what you need
- 2 About half of what you need
- 6 Some of what you need
- 13 Little of what you need

---> Skip to Section Eight on the next page.

75. Would you like to receive exams or health care from the military for a health problem you have that you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? **n=62**

- 4 Not applicable-- have no health problems caused by service in the Persian Gulf -----> *If not applicable, skip to Section Eight on the next page.*

14 No-----> *If no, skip to Section Eight on the next page.*

44 Yes-----> *If yes, continue to question 76.*

76. Which of the statements below best describes why you are not receiving care from the military for these health problems? (Check one.) **n=43**

- 29 Didn't know I was eligible for military health care
- 2 Haven't gotten around to going yet
- 3 Military medical center is located too far away
- 3 Can't get an appointment when it's convenient
- 6 Other (Please specify.)

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

**SECTION EIGHT: Health Care outside the
VA and the Military**

This section contains questions similar to the ones in the last two sections, but here we ask about exams and health care you've received outside the VA and the military since returning from the Persian Gulf War.

77. Since returning from the Persian Gulf, have you received any health care outside the VA and the military for health problems you believe were caused by your service there? (Check one.) **n=88**

47 Yes

41 No ---> If no, skip to question 85.

78. At any time since returning from the Persian Gulf, were you a patient for at least one night in a hospital outside the VA and the military for a health problem you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? **n=46**

9 Yes

37 No ---> If no, skip to question 80.

0 Can't recall --> If can't recall, skip to question 80.

79. How many times since returning from the Persian Gulf have you been a patient for at least one night in a hospital outside the VA and the military for a health problem you believe was caused by your service there? (Check one.) **n=9**

4 Once

3 Twice

0 Three times

2 More than three times (Specify number.) _____

0 Can't recall

80. At any time since returning from the Persian Gulf, have you visited any clinics, emergency rooms or doctor's offices outside the VA and the military, for a health problem you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? **n=46**

45 Yes

1 No ---> If no, skip to question 82.

0 Can't recall --> If can't recall, skip to question 82.

81. How many times since returning from the Persian Gulf have you visited a clinic, emergency room or doctor's office outside the VA and the military, for a health problem you believe was caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? (Check one.) **n=44**

3 Once

8 Twice

4 Three times

22 More than three times (Specify number.) _____

7 Can't recall

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

82. Think about ALL the exams and health care you've received outside the VA and the military on an inpatient and outpatient basis for problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf. How would you rate this care outside the VA and the military in each of the categories listed below? *(Check one box for each category.)*

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Not Applicable
Thoroughness of exams outside the VA and military	9	11	15	8	2	0
Ability of health care providers outside the VA and military to diagnose your health problems	5	10	7	12	9	2
Skill of health care providers outside the VA and military	12	14	13	6	0	0
Thoroughness of treatment outside the VA and military	7	13	10	11	3	1
Outcome of the care you received outside the VA and military: how much you were helped	5	4	13	13	9	1
Overall quality of health care outside the VA and military	7	15	14	8	1	0
Explanation these health care providers gave of medical tests	4	11	16	10	4	0
Explanation these providers gave of other health care procedures	7	13	12	9	3	1
Attention these providers gave to what you had to say	9	15	15	5	1	0
Help these health care providers gave you with arrangements to get the health care you needed	6	11	15	8	2	3

**Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses**

83. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the exams and health care you've received outside the VA and military for health problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf?
(Check one.) **n=45**

- 11** Very satisfied
- 19** More satisfied than dissatisfied
- 8** About as satisfied as dissatisfied
- 7** More dissatisfied than satisfied
- 0** Very dissatisfied

84. Do you feel the health system outside the VA and the military has provided all or almost all, most, about half, some, or little of what you need for health problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? (Check one.) **n=44**

- 8** All or almost all you need
- 10** Most of what you need
- 5** About half of what you need
- 12** Some of what you need
- 9** Little of what you need

SECTION NINE: VA Disability Benefits

85. Have you ever applied for VA disability benefits?
n=89

- 22** Yes
- 67** No ---> If no, skip to question 92.

86. Have you ever applied for VA disability benefits for health problems that you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? **n=22**

- 21** Yes
- 1** No ---> If no, skip to question 88.

87. About when did you first apply for VA disability benefits for these health problems?
(Enter month and year or check the box.)

___/___/---/___/___
month year

-OR-

[] Can't recall

88. Are you currently receiving VA disability benefits?
n=22

- 10** Yes ---> If no, skip to question 90.
- 12** No

89. Are you about to begin to receive VA disability benefits because your application for them has just been approved? **n=11**

- 11** Yes
- 78** No ---> If no, skip to question 91.

90. Are these VA disability benefits for health problems that you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf? **n=10**

- 9** Yes
 - 1** No
- > Skip to question 92.

91. At this time, are you waiting for:
(Check one box for each.)

...a decision on an application you've filed for VA disability benefits?	YES	NO
	n=10	
	2	8

...the results of an appeal you've filed in response to being denied VA disability benefits?	YES	NO
	n=11	
	3	8

Appendix II
Summary of Questionnaire Responses

SECTION TEN: Comments

92. If you have any other comments about the care you've received from the VA or the military for health problems you believe were caused by your service in the Persian Gulf War, about the special physicals the VA and military offer to those who have served in the Persian Gulf, or about any of the other topics covered in this questionnaire, please write them in the space below.

Thank you for your help!

OPTIONAL

Phone number where you can be reached for additional information, if needed:

() - _____
area code

Comments From the Secretary of Veterans Affairs



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

APR 17 1995

Mr. David P. Baine
Director, Federal Health Care
Delivery Issues
U. S. General Accounting Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Baine:

This is in response to your draft report, **OPERATION DESERT STORM: Health Concerns of Selected Indiana Persian Gulf Veterans** (GAO/HEHS-95-102). The health problems our Persian Gulf War veterans are experiencing is of paramount concern to me and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). As your report states, VA has undertaken a variety of efforts to address these problems including expanding the health examinations available to Persian Gulf War veterans and expanding outreach efforts to better assure that they are aware of the services available.

Although I am in full agreement about the need to actively seek feedback from Persian Gulf War veterans about their perceptions of provided health care, I also think it is important for GAO to clearly emphasize up front in the final report that its findings are not conclusive evidence of the amount or the quality of health care VA has provided. This report reflects the opinions of a very small and select sampling of Desert Storm veterans. Indeed, I am very concerned about the potential for a reader to misinterpret just what it is GAO has identified in this report. The introduction (page 2) indicates GAO obtained information on the current health status of the sampled veterans. It is not until one gets into Appendix I (page 19) that it is revealed GAO did not conduct medical examinations nor review medical files to verify the health status these veterans reported. Here, GAO admits the data from their surveys relied on respondents' memories. While we take no issue that these veterans are concerned about their health, we believe the introduction should clearly state the "current health status" that GAO is reporting is only unverified respondent perceptions.



Putting Veterans First

Now on pp. 1-2.

Now on p. 16.

2.

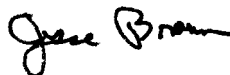
Mr. David P. Balne

GAO was instructed to review the 125 members of the ARCOM who had already reported health problems in 1991. This group represents only 10.4 percent of the 1200 members of the ARCOM who were deployed to the Persian Gulf. Adding to this limitation is the fact that only 71 percent of the targeted group responded to the GAO survey. It is likely that such a select group will differ substantially not only from other members of the 123rd ARCOM but also from the entire 697,000 service members deployed in Operation Desert Storm. I believe GAO needs to clearly emphasize this point up front in the final report. An uninformed reader of this report could easily misinterpret the data and incorrectly generalize the perceptions as being typical of all Desert Storm veterans.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has introduced many new initiatives that are not reflected in the draft report but should be in the final report. For example, in addition to the active veterans toll-free HELPLINE, a jointly-developed initiative with the Veterans Benefits Administration, VHA has also established a computer bulletin board and published and circulated informational pamphlets. It has also extensively sponsored public service announcements on radio and television. Furthermore, Persian Gulf Veterans Health Days will be scheduled in facilities throughout the country. These weekend health conferences, planned to begin in May and June 1995, will provide veterans and their families with an opportunity to attend an expert panel discussion and participate in a question and answer session with local and VA Central Office program officials. This will be followed by an additional opportunity for veterans to receive Registry examinations and compensation and benefits counseling. In October 1994, VHA published the first of a series of quarterly Persian Gulf newsletters that are being circulated throughout the system. These and many other activities reflect the ongoing VA commitment in responding to the comprehensive health care needs of these veterans.

The enclosure suggests several technical changes to the report. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on your draft report.

Sincerely yours,



Jesse Brown

JB/vz

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